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ABSTRACT

Geographical thinking focuses on the extrinsic meanings of work in English, the meanings extracted from that work, intended or not, through mediating institutional forces, relationships, and modes of spatial organization. It considers how the effects of the work of English educators are mediated by the contiguity of their courses with other courses and programs, by the proximity of their departments with other academic disciplines, professional schools, and employers, by the multiplicity of environments through which these educators and their students circulate. It addresses questions such as how do the distributive functions of English interact with its ideological functions, and how awareness of different spaces affects events in "the classroom," which has long been the self evident spatial figure for curriculum and pedagogy. A key task English educators face is to displace both disciplinary and administrative discourses by transposing them into the realm of geography and politics. To think geographically is to consider not only how institutions construct ideologies that subjects may "internalize" or resist, but also how the regulatory norms of institutions "materialize" subjects in space, sometimes without even having first to be interiorized in people's consciousness. Professional discourse often does not address the issue of space directly enough, either in its physical, social, or discursive aspects. Another area that a geographical perspective marks out for inquiry concerns how different forms of visibility shape subjectivity. Classroom discourse is often charged with meanings that derive from where the classroom is situated in institutional geographies, and who the enunciating subjects are in those geographies than in what it ostensibly says. (Contains 14 references.) (NKA)

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Lost in Space: Thinking Geographically about Pedagogy in English

"A[n]... undergraduate describes a history teacher who makes a point of stressing the superiority of Western culture in developing the ideas of freedom, democracy, and free market capitalism that the rest of the world is now rushing to imitate. She also has a literature teacher who describes such claims of Western supremacy as an example of hegemonic ideology by which the United States arrogates the right to police the world. When asked which course she prefers, she replies, "Well, I'm getting an A in both."

Gerald Graff, *Beyond the Culture Wars*

I

In discussing a student's attitude towards her education, Gerald Graff explains that the student is not entirely to blame for paying more attention to her professors' grades than their words. In Graff's view the modern university's expansion by accretion has produced a "disjunction of the curriculum" in which most students experience academic debates as a "series of monologues." Considering this situation, which Graff perceives as "a far more powerful source of relativism [among] students than any doctrine preached by the faculty" (106), Graff wonders aloud why more students don't act like "cynical relativists who care less about convictions than grades or careers" (106).

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What interests us about Graff's story is his reflexive dismissal of The student's sense of importance. Rather than lamenting the student's whimsical relativism, we might ask why particular students put grades above learning in the context of their own complex social and educational histories. We might consider how our knowledge travels, that is, how what students learn is different from what we teach, how what students learn means something different when it circulates to new locations in the academy, the community or the

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economy. We intend the notion of travelling knowledge here in a double sense. Most obviously, our students will travel with the knowledge and practices that they have learned from us, applying their learning in new ways in new contexts. Just as students travel, so do the indices of knowledge that our institutions extract from us, another way that knowledge travels. Different groups employers, admissions committees, faculty, students, community organizations and so forth all use academic knowledge in different ways.

If we overlook the implications of this student's response to our work, we risk ignoring how institutions organize not only knowledge but space, how disciplines are not only ideologically but also spatially organized. We want to argue, then, for the importance of understanding the meaning of our work as college English educators in geographical terms. Geographical thinking focuses on the extrinsic meanings of work in English, the meanings extracted from that work, intended or not, through mediating institutional forces, relationships, and modes of spatial organization. It considers how the effects of our work are mediated by the contiguity of our courses with other courses and programs, by the proximity of our departments with other academic disciplines, professional schools, and employers, by the multiplicity of environments (work, recreational, residential, urban, rural) through which we and our students circulate. It addresses questions such as how do the distributive functions of English interact with its ideological functions, and how does awareness of different spaces affect events in " the classroom," which has long been our self evident spatial figure for curriculum and pedagogy.

The problem is that our discourse about such questions tends to be highly fragmented and diffuse. Typically, debates about curricula, pedagogy and disciplinary reform in English studies draw on spatial metaphors, representing

ideology in terms of conflict between different "fields" of knowledge, or the "territorial" claims of different social groups. But the more comprehensive (and minute) questions of geography are seldom framed in a single discourse. On the one hand, we have disciplinary discourses on pedagogy, curricula, and professional issues and, on the other, managerial discourses on "retention," "diversity," "employer needs," "space allocation," "community relations" and so forth. One of the key tasks we face, then, is to displace both disciplinary and administrative discourses by transposing them into the realm of geography and politics.

II

Our concerns in this presentation will be limited to developing geography as a theoretical framework for thinking about English studies. Recent postmodern theory has increasingly shifted the focus of analysis from ideology to space. In The History of Sexuality (Volume I), for instance, Foucault emphasizes how the discourse of sexuality has worked its effects not mainly in terms of its messages, that is, its direct suasive force on individuals, but as a way of optimizing the design of institutional space and its regulatory norms (The History 2728). From a different perspective, Henri Lefebvre addresses how the design and use of space shapes human agency and subjectivity. Ideology hasn't been discarded in this work, but is increasingly seen as unable to fully account for how contemporary institutions such as the school operate.

Spaces are constituted by who is present (or absent) in them, how discourses (and silences) are distributed in them, how subjects are visible (and invisible) in them and to whom, and how subjects can move (or cannot move) between any given space and adjacent spaces. To think geographically, then, is to consider not only how institutions construct ideologies that subjects may

"internalize" or resist, but also how the regulatory norms of institutions "materialize" subjects in space — or, for our purposes, structure the work and subjectivity of students and teachers — sometimes without even having first to be interiorized in people's consciousnesses. For instance, student populations themselves are the products of visible and invisible regulatory procedures. Admissions policies, testing procedures, financial aid arrangements, and labor markets are all factors that materialize the classroom as social space prior even to the arrival of students and teachers on the first day of class. Curricula and enrollment, too, are regulatory procedures that distribute Bodies and organize space according to a variety of interests.

That space has regulatory effects on our work and subjectivity does notmean that lived experience in designed institutional environments is completely predetermined. Space is always lived as well as planned. Henri Lefebvre makes a useful distinction between " representations of space" — the abstract designs of physical space dominant groups and their experts carry out to imprint an order on the daily lives of inhabitants (36061) — and " representational spaces" — the everyday life taking place in concrete environments. While "representational spaces" are not free from the influence of planning, the meanings, values and beliefs that are produced and reproduced in lived spaces are often counter to the intentions of the designers, which users may ignore or resist" (362).

Lefebvre calls for a theory that would transcend distinctions in these concepts [transcend what? - I don't understand this reference] to better understand how the relationships between designing and using space produce contradictions between intentions and effects, reflecting conflicts between sociopolitical forces and interests (365). For instance, the design of

space in an orphanage to allow surveillance aiming to ward off the sexual activity of children may, in fact, intensify and incite the children's sexual interests. Contradictions in space arise because space is historical and not inert, not merely an empty stage on which human dramas unfold. Institutional space is designed, but not necessarily by any single identifiable person or group and often in ways that reflect contradictory interests. Moreover, as Lefebrvre emphasizes, for whatever ends space is designed, it is also continually challenged, reproduced or subverted by users.

Just as the designs of physical space are potentially reversible, so are the regulatory norms that work in any social space. This is partly so because, unlike physical spaces, social spaces are not fully discrete from one another, and the meanings of our work in any one space often spill over into others.. The meanings of English that others assign to our work often surface in the classroom, the department, the professional meeting, by a kind of ventriloquy that we often do our best to ignore until it slaps us in the face. For example, one of us teaches a writing class which is populated mostly by medical students who are in a six year combined undergraduate / medical degree program. These students are typically well prepared and for the most part able, without much trouble, have produced polished and competent writing that has usually been well received by their teachers. However, when one of us challenges this sense of easily reproducible and serviceable writing competence, it produces little discussion but an extraordinarily high level of tension and anxiety in the class. A week or so later, the hidden meanings of that tension break to the surface as a student angrily complains that the teacher is expecting too much, that the first biochemistry exam was given during the same week the paper was due and that the medical school faculty who will decide who continues in

medical school and who will be tracked elsewhere will not care nearly as much about this writing class as the student's knowledge of biochemisty. Some students are embarrassed at the crassness of this revelation. The professor contests the ideology behind the supposition that biochemisty is always more important than critical literacy in the preparation of a doctor. But critique notwithstanding, the geographical functions of such a " truth" are not really open to question. About the values that have been geographically coded in this space, the student is largely correct.

Of course, an imaginative English teacher may be able to effectively address the resentment of these students and the pressures of their situation, but this is just to say that the way space is lived in any classroom may well differ from the way it has been geographically coded. This story is interesting to us because it marks a moment when the felt reality of geographical space operating invisibly beside the ostensible content of the course becomes open to ideological critique. In other words, the meanings extracted from academic work in spaces beyond the classroom jostle with the meanings we intend to promote through our teaching.

III

Whatever our intentions, messages in a classroom are always liable to be heard as much in terms of the positioning of speakers in social space as their literal content. In the aforementioned case, resistance to academic expectations were amplified by the student population itself, since most of these students are members of a close-knit community of medical student/ undergraduates, sharing residential space in a campus dormitory, social occasions organized specifically by or for them, common academic schedules,

and so forth. A close-knit population that shares, in some ways, a common geographical position is more likely to voice coherent messages coded by that positioning.

As we said before, when these geographic codings erupt into visiblity, they become susceptible to criticism. Such criticism may not change the social space of our work in itself, but making social space visible is a minimal precondition for change. The problem is that our professional discourse often does not address the issue of space directly enough, either in its physical, social or discursive aspects. Typically, students are pictured as free consumers of their educations, able to come and go as they please, even if implicitly, they are also pictured as "beginners" or "preeconomic, presexual, prepolitical persons" in textbooks and other school discourse (Miller). This view of students as free consumers pushes issues of space and power into the background.

However, in another sense, we are all quite expert about how we negotiate institutional space, even if our professional discourse teaches us to talk about such negotiations in tacit, unelaborated, or indirect ways. We all know that what we teach travels in social networks, as the work of the discipline is appropriated by different institutions and constituencies. We talk about "planting seeds" in students that we hope will sprout later in some other context after they have left our class. We talk about "preparing" students for the next course in a sequence or, more broadly, preparing them for"citizenship" or "life." We talk about the consequences of passing or failing astudent. Less often we talk about questions like: how are curricular debates related to group struggles over access to credentials? And less often we inquire beyond our hope of planting seeds: how do particular venues of

employment allow or prevent English graduates from using their disciplinary knowledge for the progressive political ends which often guide our work?

Given the widespread interest in teaching for social change in English, we would expect more extensive research on how English travels. The relative dearth of such research enables critics of politically engaged teaching, like Stanley Fish, to snidely comment on the irrelevance of knowledge in English tosocial change: "The rhetorical analysis of diplomatic communiques... advertising, popular culture... and almost anything else one can think of has been an industry for a long time, but in almost no case have State Department officials or the members of the judiciary or even the publishers of Harlequin romances changed their way of doing things as a result of having read ... a brilliantly intricate deconstruction of their practices. Think about it. You are about to open a new business or introduce a bill in Congress or initiate an advertising campaign, but you pause to ask yourself, "What would the readers of Diacritics say?" (Fish qtd in Berube 151).

Fish is attacking the progressive claims of high critical theory here, but he intends his critique to apply to knowledge in English more generally. But to really counter or support such claims of irrelevance, we would have to know more about how our knowledge distributes students to other social contexts and how it affects their social action there. This is an area of research — how our knowledge means differently as it travels — that a geographical theoretical perspective marks out for future inquiries.

IV

Another area that a geographical perspective marks out for inquiry concerns how different forms of visibility shape subjectivity. How is the value of different forms of work in the discipline related to how they are visible?

How do different forms of visibility help materialize professional and student subjectivities? In the remainder of this paper, we want to briefly elaborate how our knowledge travels to GTAs. GTAs are especially interesting to us because of the difficulties they face in negotiating the institutional spaces where they work. Called upon to quickly adapt to new conditions, they embody contradictions in a particularly dramatic way. Although often quite familiar with "the English classroom," GTAs often find the transition from student to faculty member means more than learning teaching contents or methods. It means learning, in body as well as mind, to occupy social space in a new way.

The importance of visibility in configuring GTA identity was driven Home for one of us early in his career, as a beginning assistant professor, when conducting a summer teaching-orientation for new GTAs in the department. While ostensibly the power of supervision was vested in the GTA supervisor, the fact of multiple supervisory gazes was immediately apparent to students. During the orientation, senior faculty members would visit to address various aspects of the program, presumably with the aim of supporting the GTAs and getting them off on the right foot in their teaching and study. But the shared aim masked competing forces. While one speaker would talk about student writers and their needs, another would inform the GTAs that their teaching was "only a means to an end," as one senior colleague put it, namely of supporting "their own research and study." While some speakers sought to alert the new teachers to the complexity of teaching reading and writing, of the freshman classroom as a site where various theories of language and learning might be tested or transported, others sought to simplify and distance the GTAs teaching responsibilities, tacitly encouraging them to drain the freshman curriculum of serious intellectual content and blunt themselves to student needs in the

interests of conserving time.

The psycho-politics of GTAs in this situation is quite similar to that faced by tenure-line faculty pressured to produce a large body of research, who often can do so only by blunting themselves to the immediately present needs of others who share their social space: namely students, but also colleagues and even spouses, children, friends and so forth. In this context, sensitivity to the immediately present needs of others is the hallmark of professional immaturity. In James Sosnoski's terms, the institution enforces a choice between what we believe we should do as persons and what we believe we ought to do as professionals. As in the corporate world, where senior executives are distanced from those they manage by secretaries, anterooms, and chains of command, the profession of English teaching is marked by hierarchies in which privatized space and time mark status. But the work of teaching cannot depend on physical distancing to produce private space to the same degree as less intensively interactive forms of labor. Hence, in higher education, the production of private space must depend heavily on psychopolitical mechanisms, in addition to the use of graders, large lecture halls, techniques of segmenting student populations, and other social and physical buffers between professor and student subjectivities.

One of the effects of the professionalization of composition has been to subject GTA teaching to heightened scrutiny, elevating its value by exposing it to intensified panopticism. Richard Miller, for instance, describes his training seminar "The Teaching of Writing" at Rutgers in terms that emphasize precisely its functioning "as a disciplinary mechanism that openly relies on panopticism to exercise its power: the graduate students must all teach out of the same textbook; they must meet the Writing Program's requirements for the

minimum number of drafts and revisions;... they must pass the seminar to continue teaching" (Miller's emphases), and so forth (206). In this context, Miller notes the disjunction in the experience of GTAs between the "the Content of their education, which has entailed struggling to understand postmodern theory, to master the evolving canon of postcolonial fiction,...and the content of their employment, which requires them to find ways to communicate with students for whom stringing two coherent paragraphs is an achievement" (206-207).

The psychopolitics of professors wishing to reduce GTA teaching to "a means to an end" inheres exactly in sustaining the divide between these different tasks and the panoptic regimes that support them. Put in the crudest terms, the implicit injunction is: postmodern theory will help you do "your own work," but don't think of your first experiences of teaching, or the department's grading standards in such terms. These are practices best kept simple, best kept in the dark. This is a difficult injunction for GTAs to follow, however. Our experience is that, despite institutional incentives to seek a level of minimum competence, GTAs often put enormous amounts of time into their teaching, finding it undesireable or impossible to blunt themselves to student needs. They talk abundantly about their interactions with students. Students are present as persons, but postmodern theory only as a yet abstract text. But of course, in regard to GTAs, the work of the materializing identities is not yet done.

The irony here is that attempts to increase the value of GTA work as cultural capital must rely on panoptic regimes, since visibility is a precondition of evaluation. In order to "count" and be valued, work must be registered. What matters from an ethical frame point of view, however, is how

that work is registered, how conditions of visibility constitute power relations, materializing psyches and bodies.

For example, documentation of GTA teaching circulates internally, perhaps, to an award committee or more commonly to a committee charged with making decisions about GTA reappointments. But it less frequently gets GTA names on course schedules or departmental descriptions of curricula. And still less often does such documentation function as a form of publication, say by providing the occasion for public presentation and theoretization of the GTA's work. Similarly, classroom visits to GTAs by program directors or other faculty, depending on how they are conducted, can either help GTAs convert their work into usable cultural capital or enforce compliance with narrower institutional interests. Classroom observations conducted by experienced instructors or program directors turns teaching into a public artifact that can circulate in any number of ways. The focus of such observations may be to provoke intellectual questions about teaching practice (ultimately with the purpose of enabling GTAs to represent their teaching as a form of inquiry on par with other forms of research) or it may be to hold the line on GTA "grade inflation."

Such conditions of visibility map the "representation of space" of any given classroom. But to employ Lefebvre's terms again, the "representational space" of teaching as a lived experience is richer and less predictable. Some tenured faculty share their space and time generously with students. Programs exist that do effectively constitute GTA work teaching writing as valuable cultural capital. Such efforts are amplified by the relatively good job market for English MAs and Ph.D.'s in community colleges, which often demands evidence of strong composition teaching in ways that research institutions do not. But

for these reasons exactly, programs that alter regimes of visiblitiy to elevate the cultural capital associated with composition, and lower-division teaching more generally, often run into fierce resistence. As David Bartholomae has argued based on his work as a program evaluator, "a visible or critical oriented [composition] program is more likely to be criticized than one whose approach to writing is fairly old-fashioned (teaching topic sentences as the key to writing) or simply poorly run. That is, it is not inconsistent to find 'careless' programs housed in high-powered, critically aware English departments. Or, it is not uncommon to find English departments more troubled by an ambitious composition program than a mediocre one" ("What is Composition?" 22-23).

These geographic conditions also mediate the effect of curricula on students, just as they mediate GTA identities. While students may appreciate praise and attention, they can also read GTA willingness to engage demands and needs ignored in more prestigious quarters of the curriculum as marks of immaturity or lack of rigor. Students who are taking "weed-out" courses for scientific professions, such as Chemistry I, may regard a GTA-taught section of Introduction to Fiction as a kind of academic coffee-break, especially if the GTA's grade curve is higher than those in other courses, if the GTA attends to underprepared students in ways the chemistry professor does not, and the GTA's teaching approach recognizes a wide range of traditionally non- or post-disciplinary forms of knowledge. This effect will likely be amplified if exemption or credit-by-exam policies enable students with better academic preparation to bypass the "required" writing or humanities courses, in effect mapping this space as a ghetto for teachers and students lacking "true academic credentials."

Under such circumstances, gauging the effects of curriculum in terms of its contents and methods can be quite misleading. Classroom discourse is often charged with meanings that derive more from where the classroom is situated in institutional geographies, and who the enunciating subjects are in those geographies than in what it ostensibly says. And in that context, the student who hears the harmony of high grades above the jangle of professorial ideologies may be hearing very clearly indeed.

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